

Around Snake Corner

A Stagecoach Story

By CLARISSA MACKIE

The stage climbed the steep mountain road, the black horses plunging against the heavy load of passengers. "Whoop!" shouted Ike Williams as he guided the team around a sharp corner where jutted a great split rock. "Are there any snakes around here?" asked a timid passenger.

Ike Williams turned a ruddy face toward the passengers, and as his light brown eyes met those of a plump little woman in the corner he winked significantly.

The plump little woman looked very severe and turned her eyes away.

"Yes, sir; this is called snake corner, and it's a funny thing that every time I reach this particular rock every stranger aboard wants to know if there are snakes hereabouts."

"Well, are there any snakes?" demanded the thin woman sharply.

"There are snakes sometimes, ma'am. Once I was coming up from Cherry Brook with a load of folks, and just as we reached snake corner one of the wimmen screamed and fainted, and the others all hollered to beat the band. Of course I stopped and looked to see what was the matter."

"What was it?" demanded the passengers breathlessly.

"Trash!" sniffed Debby Bowne.

"It was a whole passel of black-snakes a-sunning themselves on the big rock."

"I was some flustered, because I knew, all my passengers being wimmen, I'd have trouble between the wimmen and the snakes and the horses here, who ain't got no use for reptiles. 'I'm a quick thinker, and'—Mr. Williams paused and cast a suspicious glance among his passengers. 'I thought somebody laffed,' he said aggressively."

No one made reply. Debby Bowne was staring through the open doorway, and the little dark man appeared to be asleep.

The other six passengers were hanging breathlessly on the words of the stage driver.

"Go on!" they cried impatiently.

"What did you do then?"

"I got down from my seat and, taking my whip, I went up to the rock and laid it on to them snakes till there wasn't one to be seen. Then I clumb back to the stage and drove on."

"The wimmen all cried with joy over getting rid of the snakes, and when we reached the top of the hill—this one we're climbing now—I happened to look back, and what do you suppose I see?" Ike paused dramatically.

"What did you see?" they asked in chorus.

"Snakes!" said Ike, frowning at the recollection. "About fifty blacksnakes, assorted sizes, all humping themselves along the road, trying to catch up with me. I reckon they would have clumb up over the wheels and right into the stage if I hadn't done some quick thinking."

"I'm something of a reader," pursued Ike modestly, "and, being interested in the critters, I'd read considerable about snakes. So I took my harmonica out of my pocket and, getting out of the stage, I went back and played 'Yankee Doodle' to them pursuing reptiles, and I'll be blamed if the hull lot didn't stand still like they was charmed, and then I played a march called 'The Retreat.' And you'll hardly believe me when I say that the hull regiment of blacksnakes turned tail and humped themselves back down the road."

"Whoo! Here you are! Willow House!"

With the words Ike halted his horses with a flourish before the door of the little mountain inn.

With the single exception of Debby Bowne the occupants of the stage dismounted at the inn. While some of them were paying the driver, the foreigner leaned toward Debby Bowne.

"Does he speak of a truth?" he inquired, nodding toward Ike Williams.

Two red spots glowed in Debby's cheeks.

"The truth is not in him!" she said emphatically.

"You know him of a certainty, that he lies?" asked the man sharply.

"I was engaged to marry him," said Debby with dry bitterness.

"Was?" repeated the man doubtfully.

"Was," emphasized Debby, "until fifteen minutes ago."

"Ah, with many thanks for the confidence," smiled the stranger, bowing himself away with his heavy basket.

Just as the stage was about to resume its journey with Miss Bowne as its sole inmate that small person skipped alertly down the steps and slammed the door upon the empty vehicle.

"Ain't you going to ride up to the lane with me, Debby?" demanded Ike in dismay.

"Not today," returned Debby crisply. "I'd rather walk than ride with such a story teller as you are. You remember what I said the last time you told that snake story?" Debby Bowne gathered her blue skirts neatly from the dust and tripped away, leaving Ike Williams to stare after her until she had quite disappeared into the opening of Whippoorwill lane, where she lived.

"I'll be blamed!" ejaculated Ike, slapping his knee with one big brown hand. "Well, what do you want?" he growled at the little foreigner who was standing by the wheel looking up at him.

"Beg pardon, but I forgot to pay you for transportation and most enjoyable ride and agreeable story," said the stranger politely.

"Huh!" was Ike's reply.

"And the little lady with the eyes of a dove, she has gone away?" asked the man.

"You mean Miss Debby Bowne?" growled Ike ominously.

The man nodded doubtfully.

"The lady who said she was engaged to you."

"Was?" bristled Ike. "Is, you mean."

"Beg pardon, but she said, 'Was engaged till fifteen minutes ago.' Ah, monsieur is most rude!" cried the stranger as he skipped back beyond reach of Ike's whip.

"Little rat!" growled Ike, his face now sobered to grim anger as he turned the stage about and returned down the mountain. When he passed snake corner he smote the black horses so savagely that they ran all the way down the mountain side, requiring all of Mr. Williams' strength and nerve to control them.

Back in Whippoorwill lane Debby Bowne was crying softly to herself over her broken engagement to the bluff stage driver, and at Willow inn the little foreigner was preparing to entertain the guests that evening with sundry conjuring tricks.

The next afternoon Ike Williams drove his stage up the mountain road. There was only one passenger inside, and she was strangely silent and unresponsive. So quiet was Debby Bowne that Ike began to believe that there was some truth in what the foreigner had hinted to him.

Was his engagement to Debby a thing of the past? He did not dare ask her for fear of the answer.

Debby Bowne worked in the postoffice and rode home in the stage every afternoon. It is not surprising that she grew tired and annoyed at hearing Ike's oft repeated snake stories, which were calculated to inspire strangers with dreadful fear.

Only a short week ago she had told Ike that if he ever repeated the black-snake story in her hearing their engagement would cease at once.

Now he shot a glance from his merry brown eyes at the third finger of her left hand.

The garnet engagement ring was gone.

Their engagement was at an end.

Now they were turning around snake corner.

Ike was lost in gloomy meditation on the front seat when the off horse shied violently.

"Whoa!" shouted Ike, and with a glance at snake rock he pulled the trembling horses to a standstill and turned his head to stare at the great fissured rock about which he had woven so many tales to scare the unwary traveler.

Coiled on the rock was an immense serpent, scaly and glistening, with horrid head lifted and swaying gently to and fro.

"Good heavens!" breathed Ike through his set teeth.

Debby leaned from a window and stared, terrified.

Then, stepping jauntily out of the mountain path, came the foreign passenger of the day before.

He bowed politely to Ike, laid his hat against his heart when he saw Debby and at the same instant glimpsed the snake on the rock.

"Mon Dieu!" he squealed shrilly. "Kill it, monsieur!"

"Kill it yourself!" roared Ike testily, his muscled arm straining at the reins as his horses plunged madly.

"But has not monsieur a happy thought in this great emergency? It is true these are not blacksnakes, but"—he shrugged his shoulders suggestively.

"Get out of the way!" shouted Ike angrily.

"Perhaps monsieur would play 'Yankee Doodle' on his harmonicon!" grinned the amused foreigner. "Thus could he soothe the frightened serpent, even as he did in the good story he related. Ah!"

At that moment the black horses broke away and dragged the careening stage after them.

Debby Bowne, white lipped and trembling, saw Ike Williams regain mastery of his team, turn them about and drive back to snake rock just in time to see the foreign conjurer stuffing the great serpent into an odd looking basket.

"Ha! Monsieur is the brave runaway," chided the joke loving Frenchman as he securely fastened the cover of the basket that contained the ancient, half stupid and entirely harmless reptile, which was one of the properties of his performance.

Ike Williams grew redder and redder as the Frenchman disappeared, and Debby Bowne sat silently within, witness of his humiliation.

Glancing out of the corner of his eye, he discerned Debby in the act of slipping the garnet ring back on its accustomed finger.

"You coming over this evening, Ike?" asked Debby softly.

"Yes, if you want me," he said hoarsely.

"Of course I want you," said Debby Bowne gently.

And Debby had part of her reward when the very next time she rode in the stage a timid passenger asked:

"Why do they call this snake corner?"

"Because there ain't any snakes here," replied Ike, with a twinkle in his eye.

PONDEROUS SEA ELEPHANTS.

They Have Two Foot Trunks and Flippers Tipped With Claws.

That which is believed to be the last herd of sea elephants known to exist is to be found at Guadalupe Island, off the west coast of Mexico. In the herd there are now only about thirty specimens.

The sea elephant is an important link in the chain of evolution and is the largest of all fin footed animals. The adult male is about twenty-two feet in length and is about eight feet high when propped up on his front flippers in a natural position. These great bulls weigh from two to three tons and have a trunk, or proboscis, which, when relaxed, hangs down over the mouth about two feet. In the end of this the nostrils are placed rather wide apart, and when they breathe their whole mass trembles in tiny undulations to the very end.

The flippers are thick and tipped with heavy claws. There is a tall about one foot and a half long, separated horizontally in two divisions. This tail acts as a propeller, to resist the huge creature when he comes in through the breakers. He holds his back flippers and tail so as to catch the full sweep of the waves, and then allows himself to be washed up on the beach.

Coarse, bristly hair grows sparsely from the back along the body, and a tough protecting crust of flesh reaches like a shield from the lower jaw down over the chest and round to the back of the neck. This billylike affair is nature's provision for protection in time of battle. The male fights viciously in the mating season, and the chest protector prevents much loss of life.

Sea elephants live on various kinds of small fish and use the trunk to seize them with. Afterward the food is transferred to the mouth precisely as elephants manage it.

EGGS BY THE YARD.

Korea Also Produces Oysters That Weigh Ten Pounds Each.

While in the orient a correspondent had occasion to call on friends who lived near Seoul, the principal city of Korea. He tells the following story:

One morning my hostess, while giving orders for the necessary things from the market for the day, mentioned four yards of eggs. I accompanied the steward that day on his marketing trip, and when the eggs were asked for the grocer reached down in a barrel and brought out the end of a large straw rope. He measured off the required length on the counter, just as a dry goods store clerk would measure off cloth, rolled it up and put it in the basket without a smile. The eggs were inside of this hollow straw rope, with a string tied on the outside of it between each egg. This effectively protected the eggs from being broken while handling.

Another day my hostess ordered two "small" oysters for dinner. This order caused me to wonder a little, for I knew that there would be seven to nine, besides the servants, but when the oysters arrived all was explained, for one weighed four and a half pounds, and the other five pounds. On inquiry I was informed that some of the oysters on the northern side of Korea weigh as much as ten pounds—Christian Science Monitor.

Bathing and Bellowing.

Primitive man boiled his water with hot stones. That was not the only use he made of them, at any rate, if he was a Scythian. The Scythian practice described by Herodotus has been claimed by some as the first recorded case of smoking. Having spoken of a kind of hemp that grew in the country, Herodotus proceeds: "Now, the Scythians, taking the seed of this hemp, go into their tents and then throw the seed upon the stones heated white hot. As it is thrown on it is burnt into smoke, producing so much that no Greek vapor bath could surpass it. And the Scythians, delighting in it, bellow. This takes the place of washing for them." It seems as though they had discovered the Turkish bath and the cigarette.

The Widow's Dower.

It is certain that "dower," the estate for life which the widow acquires at her husband's death, was not known among the early Saxons. In the laws of King Edmund the widow is directed to be supported wholly out of the personal estate. Dower is generally ascribed to the Normans, but it was first introduced into the feudal system by Emperor Frederick II, who was contemporary with the English Henry III., about 1250.

The Usual Way.

"It would never do for the farmers to get into the financial business of the nation."

"Why not?"

"From force of habit they would always be waiting to water their stock."

—Baltimore American.

Home Finance.

"Wombat, loan me \$5. It's for an investment you are interested in."

"What investment of yours are I interested in?"

"My daughter wants to buy a birthday present for your son."

—Pittsburgh Post.

Superfluos.

Tommy-Pop, what do we mean by superfluos? Tommy's Pop—Superfluos, my son, means—well, it's like a bachelor giving advice to a married man.—Philadelphia Record.

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ORDER OF HEARING ON PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF ADMINISTRATOR.

The State of Nebraska, Lincoln County, ss.

In the matter of the estate of William Shreier, Sr., deceased.

On reading and filing the petition of Lester Walker, praying that administration of said estate may be granted to himself as administrator.

Ordered, That Dec. 2nd, 1913, at 9 o'clock a. m. is assigned for hearing said petition, when all persons interested in said matter may appear at a county court to be held in and for said county, and show cause why prayer of petitioner should not be granted; and that notice of the pendency of said petition and the hearing thereof be given to all persons interested in said matter by publishing a copy of this order in the North Platte Tribune a legal semi-weekly newspaper printed in said county for three successive weeks, prior to said day of hearing.

Dated Nov. 8, 1913.

JOHN GRANT, County Judge.



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